

REMARKS

Claim Status

Claims 1, 2, and 6 through 14 remain pending in the application. Claims 3 through 5 have been previously cancelled. Claims 1 and 14 have been amended to even more succinctly define the invention and/or to improve their form. It is respectfully submitted that no new matter has been added. Claims 1 and 14 are the only independent claims.

Claim Rejections

Claims 1, 2, 7, 9 and 13 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,963,722 (Matsumoto et al.) in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,289,251 (Mandel) and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,357,743 (Endo).

Claim 6 is rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Matsumoto in view of Mandel and Endo, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,231,039 (Chung).

Claims 8 and 14 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Matsumoto in view of Mandel, Endo, and Chung, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,447,298 (Watanabe et al.).

Claims 10 through 12 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Matsumoto in view of Mandel, Endo, and Chung, and further in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,382,614 (Fukatsu et al.).

The rationale underlying each of the rejections is succinctly set forth in the Official Action.

Response to Claim Rejections

I. Regarding the rejection of Claim 1, Applicant respectfully does not agree with the analysis of the claimed invention or the application of the cited art to the claimed invention as set forth in the Official Action. Therefore, Applicant respectfully traverses the rejection as follows.

The Official Action relies upon Matsumoto to teach the sheet conveying means, first loading means, first and second lateral aligning means, stapling means, sheet bundle conveying means, and second loading means recited in Claim 1. Matsumoto discloses a sheet processing apparatus, as shown in Fig. 1. The relevant elements of the apparatus include: rollers 78-80; a bundle discharging belt 421 and bundle discharging lever 421X; a stopper plate 418; an aligning plate 412 having sides 412A and 412B; a staple unit 419; and a stack tray 411. The Official Action further relies upon Matsumoto to teach a loading position control means. Although Matsumoto further discloses controlling the movement of the sides of the aligning plate under various conditions (col. 11, lines 45-64), the Official Action acknowledges that Matsumoto fails to disclose loading sheet bundles to be loaded on the second loading means to displace the bundles from each other along the sheet conveying direction.

The Official Action further relies upon Mandel to teach the feature of Claim 1 that sheet bundles to be loaded on the second loading means are displaced from each other along the sheet conveying direction. Mandel discloses a sheet ejecting system 90 in which sheets are loaded onto a compiler tray 92 and stapled by a stapler 91. A finished set of sheets is then discharged by rollers 93 and 94 from the compiler tray onto a stacker unit 96. The operation of the Mandel system is illustrated in Fig. 1.

In contrast to the disclosures of Mandel and Matsumoto, the invention recited in Claim 1 achieves a displacement between successive sheet bundles by moving the first and

second lateral aligning means during the loading of sheet bundles onto the second loading means. This motion of the first and second lateral aligning means thus results in displacements in the sheet conveying direction. Mandel and Matsumoto, whether taken individually or in combination, do not disclose or suggest this feature. The aligning plate of Matsumoto simply aligns sheet bundles prior to loading, and fails to impart any displacement between successive sheet bundles. In Mandel, any displacement between successive loaded sheet bundles is attributable to the angle at which the stacking unit is fixed to the body of the sheet ejecting system: because loaded sheet bundles do not rest flush against the vertical edge of the stacking unit, the Official Action considers successive sheet bundles to be displaced, as illustrated in Fig. 1. However, even if Mandel teaches a displacement between successive sheet bundles, the reference does not disclose using the motion of alignment means to displace successive bundles. Therefore, the secondary citation to Mandel fails to compensate for the deficiency in Matsumoto, namely, that the aligning means move together to displace along the sheet conveying direction the loading positions of successive sheet bundles.

Notwithstanding the foregoing traversal, Claim 1 has been amended to even more succinctly define the invention. The amendatory text is based on paragraph [0120] and Figs. 12A and 12B of the original specification. The claim amendment defines the manner in which the motion of the first and second lateral aligning means results in displaced loading positions for successive sheet bundles.

II. Regarding the rejection of Claim 14, Applicant respectfully does not agree with the analysis of the claimed invention or the application of the cited art to the claimed invention as set forth in the Official Action. Therefore, Applicant respectfully traverses the rejection as follows.

The Official Action relies upon Matsumoto in view of Mandel, as described above with respect to Claim 1, and further in view of Endo, Chung, and Watanabe, to teach the features recited in Claim 14. In addition to the limitations of Matsumoto described above, the reference further discloses a discharge roller 415, which is a variable-speed roller, initially operated at high speed when a sheet is beginning to be discharged and decelerating the speed in response to the detection of the sheet end (col. 13, lines 13-39). Endo discloses a sheet processing machine including an indexer 10 having an adjustment device 50, as shown by the overhead view of Fig. 2. The adjustment device includes left and right adjustment boards 51A and 51B, which slide according to an accumulation of sheets, as controlled by a control device (col. 3, lines 56-62). Chung discloses a sheet post processing apparatus including lower tray 34, onto which sheet bundles 39a and 39a' can be stacked with an offset of a predetermined distance (Fig. 13; col. 6, lines 59-66). Watanabe discloses a finisher for binding sheets, including a chuck having upper and lower hold-down arms 446 and 447.

In contrast to the references cited by the Official Action with respect to Claim 14, the invention recited in Claim 14 achieves a displacement between successive sheet bundles by controlling the speed of the sheet bundle conveying means, where the displacement occurs in the sheet conveying direction. None of the references cited in the Official Action, whether taken individually or in combination, disclose this feature of Claim 14. While Matsumoto may read on controlling the speed of the sheet bundle conveying means, the reference does not disclose or suggest that the speed of the sheet bundle conveying means controls displacements in the loading positions of successive sheet bundles. The secondary citations to Mandel, Endo, Watanabe, and Chung simply disclose various sheet aligning and/or sheet finishing devices, and do nothing to compensate for the deficiencies of Matsumoto.

Notwithstanding the foregoing traversal, Claim 14 has been amended to even more succinctly define the invention. The amendatory text is based on paragraph [0119] and Figs. 12A and 12B of the original specification. The claim amendment defines the manner in which the loading position control means control the speed of the sheet bundle conveying means, such that the speed of the sheet bundle conveying means controls displacements along the sheet conveying direction during the loading of sheet bundles.

Dependent Claims

Claims 2 and 6 through 13 are either directly or indirectly dependent from independent Claim 1 and are allowable by virtue of their dependency and in their own right for further defining the invention. Individual consideration of the dependent claims is respectfully requested.

Conclusion

In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the pending claims are allowable over the art of record, and that the application is in condition for allowance.

Favorable reconsideration and early passage to issue of the application are earnestly solicited.

It is believed that no fee is required for this Amendment. However, the Commissioner is hereby authorized to charge any fee which may be deemed necessary in connection with this paper to Deposit Account No. 06-1205.

Applicant's undersigned attorney may be reached in our Washington, D.C. office by telephone at (202) 530-1010. All correspondence should continue to be directed to our address given below.

Respectfully submitted,

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